



SE Halifax
HD **'It's like nature's on steroids:' Well-known Canadian weather expert tackles climate change and eco-anxiety**
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HALIFAX—David Phillips, 74, has witnessed some wild weather during his 51 years in the business.

But recent years have brought greater unpredictability and damage to Canadian communities, and he's urging people to pay attention to our rapidly evolving climate and the dangers it poses.

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The senior climatologist with Environment and Climate Change Canada recently embarked on a cross-Canada tour to deliver a lecture titled 'Weather and Climate: Not What Our Grandparents Knew.'

"It has been a real change in 50 years. A lot of people think climate is a slow motion kind of change, they'll be dead before it begins to bite deep and hard. They think it's about skinny polar bears and it's like the ice ages and now we're going to warm up," Phillips said in an interview ahead of his [May 15 lecture at Dalhousie University's Weldon Law building](#).

"What I maintain is if you change the climate, you change the weather...The weather is changing. It's not that we're getting new weather, it's not as if we're getting typhoons in Truro and sandstorms in Bridgewater. What we're seeing is the same old weather, but it is more intense, more frequent, out of place, out of season, and it's wilder."

For the past five decades weather facts, news and science have been on Phillips' radar morning, noon and night. One of his favourite pastimes is keeping track of record-breaking weather. In recent years, he said those records are being smashed at an alarming rate.

"It has been an enormous difference from the previous records, like hitting a home run but out of the ballpark every time. It's like nature's on steroids," he said.

"It's almost as if something else is changing our climate other than nature, and I think it's people."

In addition to factors like greenhouse gas emissions, he said our hunger for urbanization has led us to drain wetlands for skyscrapers and to trade green space for pavement, resulting in a rapidly warming climate.

"The evidence is irrefutable. There's human DNA all over it," he said.

But until July of 1996, Phillips said he wasn't a strong believer in climate change.

"I had seen so much weather. I'd seen the variations of the seasons, I'd seen the extremes and I thought, well it's always changing, it's one of the characteristics of our climate. It's not stable and static and homogenous," he said.

All of that changed following Quebec's Saguenay flood. From July 18 to 21, 1996, many of the region's roads, bridges and other delivery systems for power and water disappeared. [Library and Archives Canada](#) described it as Canada's first billion-dollar natural disaster and the deadliest flood since Toronto's Hurricane Hazel in 1954.

By July 22, 1996, 488 buildings had been destroyed and flooding had forced almost 12,000 people from their homes. Ten people died in clay slides created by the rushing water.

"It was more water filling the Saguenay that weekend than would flow over Niagara Falls in two months. We'd never seen a situation like that and I began to think wow, that has to be the storm of a millennium," said Phillips.

"Then it was followed by the flooding in the Red River Valley and then the (1998) ice storm from hell and then it really just absolutely came tumbling one after another, and there just didn't seem to be any off season."

With every area of the country impacted by climate change, Phillips said it's easy to sometimes feel overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the issue.

"I almost suffer from eco-anxiety at times. Are we going to do anything about it?," he said, adding that nations sign treaties like the Paris agreement and the Kyoto accord and climate change continues to accelerate.

"We seem to almost feel we can engineer our way out, we can live by the flood plain, we can live by the sea. I mean one third of the people in the world live within 100 kilometres of the ocean. We have graveyards in the waiting, so to speak."

With so many risks posed by climate change, Phillips said it's important not only think differently, but to act differently. Despite the urgency, he stresses his message is not all doom and gloom. His hope lies with today's youth, a group he describes as engaged and determined to facilitate change.

"This is going to be World War Three, the idea that this (climate change) is going to be the common enemy. It'll be known by everybody. We're going to mobilize together. We're going to solve it," Phillips said.

"And I'll be dead by that time, but it gives me hope that people won't let this happen, that there's still time. But we have to move quickly. The faster we move, the less expensive and the easier it will be."

Yvette d'Entremont is a Halifax-based reporter focusing on health. Follow her on Twitter: [@ydentremont](#)

ART Waves hit the shore in Cow Bay, N.S. near Halifax on Oct. 30, 2012. More unpredictable weather means more storms, coastal flooding and erosion. A vehicle sits outside a car dealership as dikes on the Salmon River gave way in Truro, N.S. on Sept. 10, 2012. Flooding like this is becoming increasingly problematic in parts of Nova Scotia. It's set to worsen with climate change, warns Environment and Climate Change Canada's senior climatologist, David Phillips.

CO cndenv : Environment and Climate Change Canada | dlhsu : Dalhousie University

NS gclimt : Climate Change | gwea : Weather | gflood : Floods/Tidal Waves | gdis : Disasters/Accidents | gnatch : Environmental Protection | gcat : Political/General News | genv : Natural Environment | gglobe : Global/World Issues | gntdis : Natural Disasters/Catastrophes | grisk : Risk News

RE cana : Canada | namz : North America

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